

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 7, 2017

Agenda Item: HD 311 Late Shoulder Season North of Highway 84 (Bozeman to Norris Road)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

Background

Elk season structure changes are normally proposed in December with final action in February during odd-numbered years. However, occasionally FWP comes before the Commission when exceptional circumstances warrant a proposal outside this cycle. The herein proposed shoulder season in HD 311 is one such exceptional circumstance.

FWP proposes to institute a shoulder season beginning this fall running from the end of general firearms season to Feb. 15, 2018 in the north half of HD 311 – that portion north of Highway 84. The objective is to reduce game damage and reduce brucellosis risk by changing elk distribution through prescribed hunting pressure. This proposal responds to a marked and sudden change in the distribution of over 1,800 elk that has been difficult to manage using traditional options like game damage and management hunts, hazing and herders among a patchwork of numerous landowners. Although elk are not over objective in HD 311 the shoulder season guidelines allow for a shoulder season under these circumstances. This area is also within the brucellosis Designated Surveillance Area, and the elk herd of most concern here, the one at the north end of the Spanish Peaks, has a seroprevalance of 22.5%. Ranchers are very concerned about these elk mixing with their cattle. Detailed information on this proposal is found in the Commission packet.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Extensive public outreach has occurred on this proposal. It has been vetted through e-mail with over 100 individuals including landowners, landowner/watershed groups, outfitters, individual local sportsmen, representatives from 2 sportsmen's groups, MFWP game wardens, the local MFWP Commissioner, and representatives from other agencies (USFS, BLM, NRCS, etc). Concerns include that a shoulder season on private lands could lead to fewer elk on the National Forest the next fall. Positive comments are that a shoulder season may work better than the game damage hunts, will increase hunter opportunity, and landowners appreciate using hunters to manage elk herds causing damage. Landowners are nearly unanimously in favor of this change because it will help them alleviate game damage and brucellosis concerns to at least some degree. Public comment will be accepted at this meeting and through July 16.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or not considered and thereby maintain the status quo.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission adopt for public comment the proposal for a late shoulder season in the north half of hunting district 311 beginning in 2017.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission adopt for public comment FWP's proposal for a late shoulder season in the north half of hunting district 311 beginning in 2017.